

High School Equivalency Diploma Promotion

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract:

In the university atmosphere it is often rare to find a student who did not come from a high school background. These students are a unique brand of "nontraditional students" who have their own list of struggles separate from the normal canon of fears and learning curves. Everyday our country loses more prospective graduates to crime and poverty. It is my belief that if we can show them that they can strive for and complete higher educational goals, that perhaps they can be reached. My project aims to inspire the next generation of children and adults who feel "left behind" to keep pursuing their educations through getting a high school equivalency diploma and beyond. To accomplish this I worked with The Washington Township Adult Education Center to create two testimonial pieces and a 30-second ad promoting continuing education.

Acknowledgements:

I would first like to thank my honors thesis advisor for jumping onboard and believing in my crazy ideas. She has been a very inspirational and encouraging professor and advisor during my time as a student. I would also like to thank Dr. Michael Doyle whose class has helped me tremendously throughout this project by providing me with some much needed advice, information, and confidence. I am grateful to the people who worked with me at The Washington Township Adult Education Center including Mr. DaLey, Ms. Pastore, and the all-inspiring Anthony Paterson. Lastly I would like to thank my wonderful fiancé, Jarryd Stefanik, who helped me during this project by helping me with last-minute film shoots and spending hours teaching me how to work with video editing software. Without any one of these people, this project would have been nearly impossible.

Introduction:

At the age of seventeen, I found myself at home in the middle of what should have been a school day. It's hard to describe the feelings you get the day after officially dropping out of high school. Then again, there are a lot of feelings that are hard to describe, but the one that I will feel as I graduate from Ball State University, that one will be nothing but pride.

After dropping out of high school due to illness, I thought my life might be over, let alone my education, but that thought scared me into action. I made my mom one simple promise, "You will see me walk across a stage." I wanted her to know that I wasn't giving up on earning a diploma. I found hope in a GED (General Education Diploma) class that was held through the Washington Township Adult Education Center. After taking the test that changed my life, I applied to Ball State University, and to the surprise of many, got in.

I've spent four years at this institution. I've changed my major three times and my mind about a million. One of the questions I struggled with in my years here was, what are you going to do for your honors thesis project? So in my last semester, I decided to create something that could encourage others to continue with their education. I wanted people who knew the feeling that comes the day after dropping out of high school to know that there is hope for their education.

The Process:

I began my project the way I begin most things, by daydreaming. I know daydreaming doesn't sound like a very academic activity, but in my years here at Ball State I have come to find that most great feats begin with a dream. There were so many ways to approach my goal of promoting education to those who think education is lost, and I quickly got dizzy with ideas and platforms in which to promote my ideas so I decided that my next step would be to turn to the professionals. By this I mean that I talked to my thesis advisor Paige Waters, and another professor of mine, Dr. Doyle.

Not only did talking to these professors stir up more ambition for my project, but they proved to be helpful allies in my endeavors. The two biggest problems I faced were how to begin and who to star in my films. I knew that the answer to these two questions could not only get me on a roll, but would also answer many of my other questions. I was advised to start by doing research and finding a client to represent. I was given many leads, and while many of them turned up interesting information, most of the time they just led me to change my ideas, and soon I was not only confused about how I was going to promote my ideas, but who exactly I was promoting.

Eventually I decided that my best option was to return to the source of my education and tell them about my hopes for my honors thesis. They almost immediately agreed to meet with me and soon I was set on promoting continuing education by creating a

promotional package for The Washington Township Adult Education Center. We met twice to discuss the combination of our visions and get the paperwork sorted out. It was at this time that I brought my fiancé, Jarryd Stefanik, into the project as my video assistant and got to work planning the framework of a vision.

My clients Todd DaLey and Lara Pastore from The Washington Township Adult Education Center filled me in on the promotional package they had a few years earlier and knew what they would want out of their next one. I was glad to have a definite direction that I knew could help the organization. Mr. DaLey and Ms. Pastore gave me links to their previous promotional videos and asked that I do a follow-up on one or two of their current stories and create a video about my story to add as well. After reviewing the videos and discussing options such as music and the addition of B-roll, we came to the conclusion that I would make one follow-up story, one 30-second ad spot, and the addition of my story. Each of the promotional story videos was to be between one and four minutes.

The next step in the process proved to be the biggest struggle for me because for the next few weeks we waited. The interview location and time were hard to secure on short notice, and when it came to the combination of my class schedule along with the work schedule of my video assistant and the schedule of our interviewee, at times it seemed a little shaky. Luckily, I got to film the interview and B-roll for my story during this time.

After meeting my prospective interviewee during our first B-roll shoot, I knew he was the perfect person for the part.

We met Anthony to shoot his B-roll while he working as a teacher's aide at one of the adult education classes. Anthony was a motivated and inspiring man who had a truly empowering story to share. I had watched his previous interview before, but meeting him in person only sparked my motivation further. This experience was even more educational because I got the opportunity to meet Miss Beth, who is a teacher for the Washington Township Adult Education Center. She informed me of the current problems facing today's education and the changes that had occurred in the test-taking process since I had left. I had read about the switch from General Education Diploma to High School Equivalency Diploma, but being in the classroom and talking to Beth brought it to life.

I took the opportunity to set up Anthony's interview while I was recording his class, and we were able to work out a day the following week for his official interview. The day of Anthony's interview my fiance and I drove to the Washington Township Adult Education Center and set up our equipment which included a backdrop, camera, tripod, light kit, and clip-on microphone. After everything was in place, we showed Anthony where to sit, where to look, and how the interview would proceed.

Anthony's interview went very well, and I was ready to proceed into the editing portion of my project. Video editing is new to my skill set this semester and in all took about fifteen hours including the learning curve. This phase includes importing the video files, watching the whole of the videos, cutting the video down to the right size while creating a viable story line, and adding effects, music, and titles. Since I am very new to the editing process, my fiancé graciously helped me with the process and inserted the music and title slides into all three of my videos.

The last portion of the project was to watch the videos multiple times and tweak small measures such as the volume of the speakers and the background music and change titles to match the videos' ambiance. I am happy to say all three videos have been completed and are ready to turn over to the client for final editing preferences.

The Educational Outcomes:

This project proved to be as rewarding as it was challenging. I have learned many skills that I plan to take with me into the job market. This project has also further sparked my interest in nonprofit promotion, and I feel very ready to jump into the field. During this semester I was also a part of an oral history immersive learning project and through the combination of the two I have not only gained a beginner's skill level, but feel comfortable with videography and video editing. I have also gained confidence in the area of client relations and professional communication.

There are two unexpected gains I got through this project as well. The first is that I learned how to conquer my fear of being in front of the camera and gained the courage to tell my story for those whom it could inspire. The second thing I gained through this project was an incredible respect and understanding of the diversity of people and situations in the High School Equivalency classes. I can only pray that all of my academic and professional endeavors inspire me this much.



(From Left: Michelle Snyder, Anthony Paterson, Jarryd Stefanik)